

**The Northeastern United States in the
Next Two Decades—**

**Implications for the Northeast Region
of the National Park Service
Summary**

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August 2001

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Summary

Study Purpose-- The purpose of this study was to identify trends within numerous areas of life, which are expected to affect the Northeast Region (NER) of the National Park Service (NPS). More specifically, the paper will seek to identify changes in the states within the NER of NPS which have direct implication for the NPS in terms of: a. number and characteristics of future visitors, b. their expectations, onsite behaviors and desired benefits, c. constraints to visitation, d. logistics of visitation, and e. demand for services.

The states within the service area of the NER of the NPS include: Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia and West Virginia. The District of Columbia is not included in this region.

The research was not undertaken to develop specific recommendations concerning NPS policy or site specific operations within the Northeast Region. Rather, it serves to provide key concepts, ideas and trends extrapolated from both statistical and non-statistical projections concerning the near future which have direct implication for the management and operation of the Northeast Region of NPS. Most of such projections will deal with the time period from 2000-2020, although a few concern longer time periods.

This report is written for management- level employees of the NPS in the NER and those who love their national parks.

Number and characteristics of future visitors-- There will be more visitors to NPS sites in the NER during the next few decades. Overall, such increase may roughly reflect the increase of the population by 0.7% of 1.86 million people per year in the NER. The amount of increase in visitation per site will vary dramatically and tourism will be a tangible contributor to that variation. That is, there will be an increase in visitation by tourists from both the US and from other countries who have traveled from one hundred to several thousand miles, stayed overnight, undertaken sightseeing, and have visited NPS sites as either part of a sightseeing agenda or as the primary purpose for the visit. Visitors to NPS sites in the NER will be markedly more diverse, older, more likely to be women and ethnic minorities, less likely to be a family, and are likely to vary more by size of group. Most users will be better educated and more inquisitive about numerous issues. A minority of visitors will be less educated and will have different needs and expectations--sometimes they will have no expectations.

The percent change in the resident population for the NER states (except Delaware) between 1990 and 2000 was lower than the percentage change for the entire U.S., and this trend is likely to continue (See Demography, pages 20-58). In terms of the NPS in the NER, these slower growth rates may mean that overall attendance within the NPS sites in the region grow at a slower rate than other regions, putting the NPS in the NER at a disadvantage in competing for resources. Tourism visitation to sites in the NER over the next twenty years may not reflect this slower growth rate, and indeed may be

significantly above average for certain sites. This may further stimulate partnering with other agencies, fund raising, and entrepreneurial effort in the operation of sites. The NPS in the NER has an opportunity to provide a national and international leadership role by showing that partnerships can be a viable mechanism for balancing promotion and preservation. Realistic appraisal and acceptance of common strengths and weaknesses should frame the partnerships.

During the next 50 years, there will be slower rates of growth in outdoor recreation activities than in population growth, due to the generally lower income levels of ethnic minorities, who will make up an increasing portion of the population. Activities whose growth is dependent upon Anglo involvement and the involvement of young people, such as backpacking, tennis, and golf will grow more slowly. Increased participation in outdoor recreation activities will be most pronounced among ethnic minorities and the largest percentage increases in number of participants will be among those age 50 and over.

As the American society continues to become increasingly "de-familied", --an increasingly smaller portion of all households containing a family-- visitors to NPS sites will increasingly visit in non-family groupings and new assumptions will have to be made about the social relations of visitors to continue to attract them. The number of households is increasing substantially in all NER states. Since the household remains the primary social group from which NPS visitation takes place, this increase in number and change in composition of households may mean that they will need to be socialized into the process of visiting NPs sites in the NER. This will be true of both domestic and international visitors.

In summary, the most important demographic trends affecting the NPS in the NER are (De Jong, January 22, 2001):

1. NER population increases but below (about half) the national average
2. Increasing urbanization and population density
3. Low fertility--smaller portion of children in the population
4. Increasing life expectancy and earlier retirement
5. Increased diversity in family and household composition (the de-familied society trend)
6. Increasing family income inequality
7. Continued sex ratio imbalance (more women than men)
8. Increasing number of immigrants
9. Increasing local community race and ethnic composition diversity
10. Out-migration from NER slows but in-migration to NER remains low
11. Increasing educational attainment levels
12. Marked local-area variation in population growth/decline.

Increasing demographic differences at a local or sub-state level of the U.S. population may mean that aggregate demographic trends in the NER region or the U.S. may not serve as a useful basis for predicting visitation or the characteristics of visitors at a given

site. Instead, site specific information concerning user characteristics and preferences must be obtained on a continuous basis. Sites with a high percentage of international tourists will increasingly obtain relevant user profiles from global rather than local information sources.

Visitor Expectations, onsite behaviors and desired benefits

Visitors will have more diverse expectations, onsite behaviors and desired benefits. The emerging "have" culture--high-income, education and access to technology-- will have heightened expectations about all aspects of their visit: from interpretation to cleanliness. They will, on average, desire to undertake more activities during a given visit. Such visitors will want the visit to be both more information-rich and yet more convenient and simplified, and many will be more impatient. The "have not" visitors-- low income, low education and little access to technology-- will increasingly show genuine concern for the environment and will expect the NPS to take leadership in environmental issues, even when the visitor is inconvenienced. Interpretation will become more important. It will need more diverse, yet specifically targeted, interpretive formats for both domestic and international have and have not visitors.

The programmatic and experiential aspects of NPS visitation will become increasingly important in visitor satisfaction and the creation of memorable experiences will become the most important variable in determining level of visitor satisfaction. Increasing diversity in most areas of life in the NER states will produce more variation in behavior, sequence of behavior, pace, meaning and satisfaction with what is undertaken. For the NPS in the NER, this will mean an increasing preference among visitors to visit during all hours of the day and night and at all times of the year. It will also mean that such visits will vary more in terms of length of stay. NPS sites in the NER may more closely resemble a supermarket in terms of hours of operation. Flexibility of the site and staff will be essential components in determining visitor satisfaction. This will produce problems of staff scheduling, visitor safety, and decisions as to when interpretive and other onsite events should be scheduled.

"Have not" visitors will have fewer expectations and want the visit to provide entertainment and all visitors will need and expect more onsite accommodation of visitor health and safety concerns. Older users will need convenient restrooms, more shelter from heat and cold and more staff assistance in travel onsite. Accommodating the needs of those with disabilities will become a more continuous issue as desired level of accommodation and cost increase while budgets may not.

The notion of weekdays being primarily about work and weekends being about leisure is not true for most households (See Time Use and Leisure Behavior, pages 59-66). This distribution pattern will contribute to an increasing tendency among time-conscious visitors toward short NPS visits. Visitors, including tourists, to NPS sites will be likely to be more rushed now than in the past and to spend less time onsite. Onsite behavior of rushed people may be managed by attempting to accommodate the feeling of being rushed by shortening the length of programs, events and waiting time, or by

slowing down the visitor by purposefully seeking to provide a more tranquil, less rushed environment. For example, covering less of the trail or territory can shorten length of an activity such as an interpretive nature walk. Thus, the level of interpretation might be the same although the activity takes a shorter period of time.

Within the NER states, the population that is 65 or over is projected to increase at rates comparable to national figures (See Demography, pages 20-58). This increase in the "elderly" population can have significant consequences for the operation of NPS sites in the NER. While "elderly" people are becoming more diverse, there are central tendencies associated with old age, which will require increased attention. Older people, on average, have higher levels of fear of crime, are less tolerant of weather extremes or loud noise, are generally more deliberate in their behavior, commit far fewer crimes, drive more slowly, stay longer onsite in parks, exhibit great interest in plant and animal life and in American history, are less tolerant of litter, pay more attention to diet, etc. As a higher portion of elderly who are "active" make greater use of NPS sites in the NER, these tendencies will need to be catered to.

Numerous aspects of health will assume a more important role in the management of NPS sites in the NER (See Health and Wellness, pages 131-136). Not only will an aging visitor base, which is better informed about personal health issues, make more demands on the system related to their own health issues, health maintenance and improvement of health will become increasingly important motivations for use of some NPS sites. In particular, stress reduction and physical exercise will become more critical and highly valued aspects of park visitation. Additionally, NPS sites in the NER will be increasingly vulnerable to airborne and waterborne epidemics.

In the emerging knowledge economy, it is likely that the comparative power of women with high levels of education will increase, the wage gap will close or favor women, more joint career decisions will be made which consider women's job prospects first, and the centrality of women as decision-makers will increase in regard to use of free time within families and couples. Globalization coupled with expanding economic and marketing forces means that this trend for women is true internationally as well as nationally. Such changes may mean that women will visit NPS sites more frequently, will place increasing demands for differentiation of sites and services to meet their interests and cultural background, and will exert more power in shaping NPS operations. This may affect numerous areas of NPS operations, from restrooms to the ways in which historical and natural sites are interpreted. In terms of history, for example, NPS may have to interpret family history and cultural history more than they currently do, while not excluding military, political and natural history.

The NPS in the NER will experience a growing trend reflecting more days being spent on a given outdoor activity with fewer trips for any specific activity, indicating that participation in outdoor recreation activities (See Outdoor Recreation, pages 67-71) increasingly will be planned with the intent of participation in multiple outdoor recreation activities. In other words, outdoor recreational activities increasingly will be parts of multipurpose recreation trips. Outdoor recreation trips will more likely be undertaken

with the objective of participating in a multitude of recreational activities during a single trip, as opposed to engaging in a single activity during a single trip. Concomitantly, the NER will experience increasing pressure from outdoor recreationists demanding sites that provide a diverse resource base for multipurpose recreational trips, involving water- and land-based outdoor recreation activities. This may also somewhat minimize friction among various participant groups onsite, since they are more likely to be doing activities which “compete” with each other. It appears that annual days of participation in a wide range of outdoor recreation activities will increase faster than the number of trips undertaken for the primary purpose of participating in such activities. These projections, however, are made less certain by the multiple influences of global warming (See Environment, pages 143-150).

Participation in specific outdoor recreation and tourism activities in the NER states will be increasingly influenced both positively and negatively, by changing climatic conditions. Climate will become more important to outdoor recreation activity, lessening predictability of outdoor events, reshaping outdoor dress, behavior, and duration of activity, and ultimately altering attitudes toward being outdoors.

Constraints to visitation. Lack of awareness of sites will become a bigger issue among the emerging “have not” component of society and among immigrant groups. Such groups will have to be taught how to use NPS sites in satisfying ways and this effort will involve outreach on the part of NPS in the NER. The NPS in the NER may need to use specific ethnic media and provide written materials in ethnic languages, based on the increasing numbers of Hispanics and Asians in concentrated geographic areas within the United States. Pressure from increasing numbers of international tourists will contribute to this trend.

Visitation will be constrained more noticeably by increased traffic congestion (See Transportation, pages 123-130). Some sites may reach predetermined carrying capacities and be temporarily closed. Extreme weather and increasing heat will prevent visitation to a greater degree and may cause more harm to sites, particularly those which are low lying and close to water, such as Ellis Island, again leading to temporary closure.

Higher population densities in most NER states will pose challenges to NPS sites as issues of crowding, traffic congestion, and waiting may increase (See Demography, pages 20-58). The need for NPS staff to conceive of and plan for the visitation process in ways which consider all five steps in the visitation process (anticipation, travel, participation, travel and recall) will increase. Levels of constraints for people who want to visit but can’t or don’t will increase and must be better understood by staff. The effect of increased density, in combination with an aging population, may mean that the negative effects of increased density are magnified, preventing older people who wish to visit from doing so or making visitation more difficult.

Logistics of visitation. Visitation to NPS sites in the NER will become more planned and the logistics of visitation will become more information rich (See Transportation, pages 123-130). Visitation will vary more dramatically by time of day, day of week,

week of year and season of visitation. Climate change will affect the season of visitation, extending peak visitation season for most sites. Extreme weather will make planned visitation less predictable (See Environment, pages 143-150).

Demand for services. A central issue in calculating demand for services is the extent to which both immigrant populations and resident youth are made aware of and socialized into NPS visitation (See Demography, pages 20-58). In a de-familied society, demand for services will increasingly hinge on the extent to which non-family groups are aware of and value the opportunities to visit NPS sites in the NER. Creating such demand will involve new ways of reaching potential domestic and international visitors, involving experimentation and different strategies for individual sites.

There will be more demands for the mass customization of services (See Organizational Response to Change, pages 158-169). That is, individuals will increasingly want to be accommodated at the individual level concerning: what the visit means, what benefits are sought, what onsite behaviors are desired, what information is provided, the creation of memorable experiences, and accommodation of the ethnic, health, and lifestyle preferences of visitors. This customization will take different forms at different sites. For example, recognizing the impossibility of meeting all tourist needs, some sites will become more focused by providing specific types of experience. Sites providing similar experiences may network and cooperate locally and regionally, and market nationally and internationally.

While individual NPS sites may become more differentiated in terms of how they operate, there will be an increased interest in the NPS Ranger as a unifying symbol of what these diverse sites are all about. The ranger icon will be more widely utilized in both NPS marketing and in synergetic efforts with other organizations.

Given increased visitation levels, the visitation process will often become more formalized, with many potential visitors wanting more information supplied to them prior to the visit concerning travel routes, parking, crowding, special events, onsite activities, and other types of information. Individuals will increasingly desire that specific, orchestrated experiences be available within given time frameworks and will be willing to pay for what they see as a valuable experience (See Economic Conditions and Employment, pages 151-157). Valuable experiences may be redefined partly from environmental necessity and partly from changing social norms.

Specific ethnic, immigrant, lifestyle, disability and other groups will increasingly want customized opportunities to visit and participate. Immigrants from diverse countries and from diverse ethnic backgrounds will visit NPS sites in the NER in ways which are mostly in common with present visitors. Particularly at urban NPS sites in the NER, visitors will pursue a common pattern of onsite behavior regardless of ethnicity. They will also not vary greatly in terms of what satisfies them. Safety, cleanliness, attentive staff who know about them and care about them, convenient access, contact with nature, and memorable experiences are all features which these diverse groups will value in common.

There is reason to believe that the growth of the 65-75 year old contingent will make more visits to NPS sites. There is evidence that the 65 to 75 age group is slightly more likely than other age groups to visit local parks on a frequent basis. As retirement increasingly comes later in life with a higher portion of "retired" people continuing to work part- or full-time, their visits to NPS sites may be for shorter durations of time than those who are completely retired. Non-retired elderly will otherwise more closely conform to the behavior and attitudinal patterns of those in the labor force in terms of NPS park visitation. There will also be increasing demand for sites to be "programmed," with a variety of special events and activities for diverse visitor segments. Many NPS sites will need staff skilled in recreation programming and special event management, particularly if the NPS in the NER promotes sites as backdrops for mega-tourism events.

An increasing part of the demand for services may be conceived of as tourism demand (See Tourism, pages 72-111). That is, NPS sites in the NERR will increasingly be defined, recognized and marketed as tourist sites. To the extent the individual sites conform to the evolutions of tourism sites, which recognizes continuous change in both form and function, it will be increasingly evident that attaining a balance point at any one tourism site is elusive and volatile. For example, because tourism is a fundamental driver of economic significance, tourism research and analysis has lopsidedly emphasized its financial and marketing strengths. By narrowly designating it as an industry, tourism dons a mantle of legitimacy. Although this designation further elevates tourism's importance as an economic tool, conversely, by being seen as only a business, tourism becomes increasingly isolated from its social, cultural and environmental roots. To reduce volatility, the business side of tourism will increasingly need to share center stage with the social, cultural, and environmental aspects of tourism. New strategies, mechanisms, and policy instruments will be required to achieve individual and regional site objectives. Although most NER sites will be maintained, regardless of financial, social, ethical or political costs, other sites will be subject to critical evaluation.

Part of the demand for NPS services in the NER will come from the those in various parts of the tourism industry, both entrepreneurs and state and government agencies involved in tourism at the local, state, national and international level (See Governance, pages 137-142). Partnership benefits are often socially, culturally, and environmentally uneven, frequently compromising the integrity of the environment, the tourist experience, and the tourism attraction in order to meet increasing demands of an economically driven user base. To balance sustainability, development and demand for services, not only does the NPS in the NER have a responsibility for raising consumer (tourist) awareness, but also is equally responsible for addressing producer (business partner) awareness of the tensions involved in site management.

The demand for services in the NER is likely to be systematically different from any other region of the NPS. The areas in which these sites reside are the most urban. The sites themselves are less likely to be large tracts of land with unique ecological value, and the amount of demand which is for "programs" may be higher than any other region.

While the rate at which people move is declining slowly in the U.S., due in large part to the aging of the Baby Boom Generation, those in the NER are less likely to move than those in any region of the U.S. (See Demography, pages 20-58). In terms of the NPS in the NER, this lack of mobility may have several implications. First, those who visit NER sites from the region may be more likely to be making a repeat visitation, thus knowing more about the site. It may also deter some visitation since more potential visitors will have “been there, done that.” Third, it could mean a greater portion of visitation will come from “non-locals,” since longtime residents may lose interest. Locals who continue to use such sites may become more highly specialized in their onsite behaviors and there may also be more potential for education about the site to longtime visitors.

As the 21st century unfolds, it appears that the NPS in the NER will be used by the public more for purposes which are recreational or for the pleasurable use of leisure rather than visitation based on the reasons for the establishment of such sites. Accommodating such demand will make the NER increasingly distinct from other regions.

The Northeastern United States in the Next Two Decades—Implications for the Northeast Region Of the National Park Service

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify trends within numerous areas of life, which are expected to affect the Northeast Region (NER) of the National Park Service (NPS). More specifically, the paper will seek to identify changes in the states within the NER of NPS which have direct implication for the NPS in terms of:

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The states within the service area of the NER of the NPS include: Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia and West Virginia.

The research was *not* undertaken to develop specific recommendations concerning NPS policy or site specific operations within the Northeast Region. Rather, it serves to provide key concepts, ideas and trends extrapolated from both statistical and non-statistical projections concerning the near future which have direct implication for the management and operation of the Northeast Region of NPS. Most of such projections will deal with the time period from 2000-2020, although a few concern longer time periods.

Seeking to predict the future is, of course, prone to error. Change is both continuous and incremental—e.g., the aging of the population, as well as sudden and discontinuous, e.g., a cure for AIDS. The interplay of both kinds of change has historically made folly of many predictions. Even in terms of continuous change, there are severe limits in prediction. Most analysts agree that population projections are unlikely to be accurate for periods that exceed the data base for which projections are made for more than ten or twenty years (Pant and Starbuck, 1990). Such limitations, however, do not eliminate the value of prediction.

“Prediction machinery need not see like a prophet to be of use. It needs only to detect limited patterns—almost any pattern—out of a background camouflage of randomness and complexity.” (Kelly, 1994, p. 427).

The important issue is not to recognize underlying causes, but rather order.

According to Modis (1992), one can find three types of order in the greater web of human interactions:

INVARIANTS

The natural tendency for humans to optimize their behavior produces little variation. Over the decades, for example, people vary remarkably little in how much time they devote to various activities. Marketplace pressures for efficiency push human systems in a single predictable direction toward optimization (Kelly, 1994, p. 436).

GROWTH CURVES

The larger and more decentralized a system is, the more it takes on the aspects of organic growth. This life span can be plotted in an S shaped curve—slow birth, steep growth, slow decline “. . .the shape of the ending is symmetrical to the shape of the beginning” (Modis, 1992, p. 437). One can find such curves in the participation rates of many recreation and leisure activities.

CYCLIC WAVES

The seemingly complex nature of a system is, in part, a reflection of the complex structure of the system's environment. Cyclic phenomena in nature can give a cyclic flavor to the systems operating within it. Thus, weather patterns help shape the profitability of agriculture or the extent to which airlines achieve on time departures.

In what follows, the authors have sought to deal with all three types of order. In doing so, subjective judgment and interpretation were necessary. While the paper concentrates on the Northeast Region (NER) of the United States, it should be noted that many trends affecting this region are essentially international, some national, regional, state specific, system specific, or unique to a region, community or micro area.

The paper attempts to inform, raise consciousness, and, on occasion, proselyze. It is subjective in its interpretation, although hopefully informed and unbiased in its presentation of trend data. The subject areas of the paper have been divided into Demography, Time Use and Leisure Behavior, Outdoor Recreation, Tourism, Lifestyle and Values, Transportation, Health and Wellness, Governance, Environment, Economic Conditions and Employment, and Organizational Response to Change.

It is natural that these areas are overlapping and interrelated in highly complex ways. In some cases, therefore, issues are identified under one subject area somewhat arbitrarily. Within each subject area, *Propositions* are presented when, in the judgment of the authors, the prediction made is highly likely to occur. *Salient Issues* are identified when in the judgment of the authors, the direction or outcome of an issue cannot be predicted but the importance of the outcome of the issue can be predicted. Both Propositions and Salient Issues are sometimes divided into sub-sections, depending upon

the complexity or scope of the proposition or issue.

It should be noted that one of the problems of prediction is that it may impose a certain “tyranny,” in effect stating—here is what will inevitably happen, e.g., the world population will inevitably grow (Dublin, 1989). Such a tyranny must be resisted by those who receive predictions by working toward their preferred futures.

About the Authors

Geoffrey Godbey is Professor of Leisure Studies in the College of Health and Human Development at The Pennsylvania State University. The author of eight books and over 100 articles concerning leisure, work, time use, tourism, and the future, he is the past President of the Academy of Leisure Sciences and the Society of Park and Recreation Educators. Godbey has written for a wide variety of academic journals and has given over 100 presentations in eighteen countries concerning the relation of trends to recreation and leisure behavior. He has conducted research on constraints to leisure participation, the future use of forests for recreation, older people's use of local recreation and park services, the impact of ethnic change on outdoor recreation, relations between health and use of leisure, and the impact of changing demographics on use of free time and time use. In the spring of 1997, Godbey was on sabbatical at Lehigh University's Agility Forum, a think tank devoted to reshaping organizations to cope with discontinuous change. He is currently at work on a book about the coming mass customization of life. His books have been translated into Chinese, Korean, and Spanish. Godbey currently serves as an advisor to the government study team on Economic Development and the Leisure Industries in the People's Republic of China.

Gordon F. De Jong is Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Demography and Director of the Graduate Program in Demography at Penn State University. He is former editor of *DEMOGRAPHY*, the official journal of the Population Association of America and is Chair-elect of the Population Section of the American Sociological Association. Over his academic career De Jong has published three books, over 100 professional articles and reviews, 50 public policy documents and reports to sponsors, and awarded 21 external research and training grants and contracts. He has conducted funded research projects in eight countries and held visiting research and teaching positions at the East-West Population Institute (U.S. State Dept.) and the Netherlands Graduate School of Research in Demography.

Vinod Sasidharan is an Assistant Professor in Recreation, Parks, and Tourism at San Diego State University, USA. He obtained his Ph.D. degree in Leisure Studies from The Pennsylvania State University, USA in 2001 and his Masters degree in Tourism Policy and Management in 1995 from the University of Birmingham, UK. His primary research focus includes urban recreational resource planning and management and sustainability issues in tourism planning and management. He has published papers in the areas of recreation and tourism trends in response to global climatic change; urban wildlife and environmental values of ethnic minorities in urban park use; sustainable development of coastal and marine tourism resources; and tourism ecolabeling.

Originally from Scotland, Careen Mackay Yarnal is a second year Ph.D. student in the Leisure Studies Program at Penn State University. She has an M. A (with honors) in Geography from the University of Aberdeen and subsequently gained an M.Sc. in Geography from the University of Calgary with an emphasis on recreation and cartography. Although her interests are diverse, the broad underlying themes of her

dissertation at Penn State focus on the intersections of tourism, geography, sociology and the broader patterns and processes involved in why people travel for pleasure. In addition to nearing completion of her course work, including a minor on Geography, Careen is also involved in several research projects and related publications. The projects include: serious leisure, gender and volunteer fire fighters in Pennsylvania (research assistant); a marketing study for Centre County Visitor's Bureau (research assistant) and an analysis of the role of loyalty in group tour behavior (co-investigator). Careen received the Hintz Graduate Educational Enhancement Fellowship during both academic years 1999-2000 and 2000-2001. She also received the National Tourism Foundation Graduate Research Grant for the year 2001-2002. Careen will graduate in the spring of 2003 and intends to pursue her interest in tourism by remaining in academia.

The authors wish to thank John Karish of the National Park Service and Brent Yarnal of Penn State University for their valuable help in developing this document.